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SUBJECT: HASHIMI ON ELECTION DIALOGUE, EMPOWERED
PRESIDENCY, IRAQ-KUWAIT RELATIONS

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Classified By:

Charg d'Affaires, Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: DCM and PolM/C met with Vice President Tariq al-Hashimi on December 19 to follow up on a range of issues that NEA Assistant Secretary Feltman had raised with Iraqi leaders during his recent visit. During the meeting, Hashimi affirmed his dedication to pre-election dialogue with other blocs; complained that PM Maliki was an ineffective leader beholden to Iran; advocated a constitutional amendment to phase out the Presidency Council in favor of a strengthened president with veto power; and stressed the importance of settling the Iraq-Kuwait border and improving Iraq-Kuwait bilateral relations. End summary.

PRE-ELECTION DIALOGUE: "EVERYONE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE."

[¶2.](#) (C) Hashimi agreed with Embassy officials that pre-election dialogue is vital, especially since no single bloc will likely be able to form a post-election majority. The VP explained that sectarian quotas may not be relevant because voters are "fed up" with them. He stressed the need for the current government to develop a platform for the next four years that professional and non-sectarian Iraqi government officials could then implement. In that regard Hashimi alluded to President Obama's retention of Secretary of Defense Gates, who he believed had bi-partisan respect. He noted concerns among some political factions that his alliance with Allawi would resurrect the Ba'athists, but he stressed that "we won't copy the previous regime" and that "we're talking about an inclusive regime."

MALIKI HAS "NO TEAM SPIRIT."

[¶3.](#) (C) Hashimi was frustrated that the December 16 three-hour session of the Political Council for National Security (PCNS) failed to produce recommendations to improve security. He accused PM Maliki of not having "team spirit." Hashimi believed that the Prime Minister convened the session mainly to bolster his reputation in the wake of the December 8 bombings. He said the Presidency Council rejected a statement that President Talabani and the PM had allegedly agreed to prior to the meeting that would have expressed the Presidency Council's support for the government. Claiming that he has tendered his resignation twice, Hashimi said he felt "guilty" about not being able to protect Iraqis from the bombings. He noted that tribal leaders sometimes came to him to complain about the lack of basic services and "accuse us of living in five-star comfort and ignoring their tragedy."

¶ 14. (C) Hashimi told us that he supports a constitutional amendment that would empower the Iraqi president in a new government with veto power, and claimed that the present text of the constitution does not explicitly grant veto power to the president. (Note: Under Article 138 of the Constitution, the Presidency Council--with its veto power--lapses upon completion of the current term of the Council of Representatives. SEPTEL. End note.) "What's the point of a president with zero power?" he asked. Extending the Presidency Council's existence into a new government may not be necessary, he explained, if a constitutional amendment passes. He suggested including a referendum on an amendment passes. He suggested including a referendum on an amendment in connection with the parliamentary elections planned for next year. Hashimi noted that the issue has been pending since 2005, as part of the Article 142 process, and that it has stagnated in the parliament's Constitutional Review Committee. (Ref A) Asked by the DCM about Kurdish reaction to a more powerful presidency, Hashimi noted that they might insist on a Kurdish president. "But if they do that," he said, "I will tell them that non-Kurdish parties will select the president." Hashimi stressed the importance of the Kurds conceding either the Presidency or the Foreign Ministry and said he told Barzani that "Arabs will not concede this point."

IRAQ LACKS A REGIONAL STRATEGY

¶ 15. (C) Hashimi blamed PM Maliki for the lack of an Iraqi strategy to deal with its neighbors. He claimed that a briefing had been planned with Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari, after which parliamentary committees would form to deal with various aspects of external relations. He complained that PM Maliki initially agreed to the plan but changed his mind the next day and "let it drop." Hashimi claimed there was increasing Iranian domination of pilgrimage routes, which PM Maliki endorsed to the detriment of other priorities in external relations. Whereas Iraqi tourist companies used to shepherd Shia tourists from the international border to the holy cities and house them in hotels, the VP said that Iranians now dominate the business(Ref B).

¶ 16. (C) Hashimi emphasized that Iraq-Kuwait relations are paramount. "The Iraqi people will never accept it if we have no access to the Gulf... the border is a real stumbling block, and we have to take care of it," Hashimi said. He saw the resolution of outstanding Iraq-Kuwait issues as essential to Iraq's stability and economic health. Moreover, Iraq would need to attract investment from Kuwait and from the other GCC countries. Noting that he had lived in Kuwait for a decade, Hashimi lamented the missed opportunity in the 1980s to cement close relations, when the two sides had enjoyed much warmer relations.

¶ 17. (C) To repair Iraq-Kuwait relations, Hashimi advocated confidence building measures (CBMs) backed by strong U.S. support. "(The Kuwaitis) should understand that no one will repeat Saddam's mistake," he said. As part of CBMs, Hashimi called for more joint Kuwaiti-Iraqi companies, and more direct Kuwaiti investment in Iraq's economy. "Let them see the benefits of that" he said. PolM/C noted Kuwaiti willingness to accept a technical committee to deal with navigation issues in the Gulf. Hashimi described ongoing difficulties with the Kuwaitis preventing Iraqi fisherman from reaching the port of Umm Qasr in the south, and explained that the Ministry of Agriculture houses a department that records all such incidents. Beyond CBMs, Hashimi was optimistic that dialogue could ameliorate relations with Kuwait and noted that he recently convinced Kuwait's emir to release seventeen Iraqis who had been imprisoned since the Gulf War. DCM agreed that CBMs were a good idea but emphasized that changing the border between the

two nations would be very difficult.

WHITE HOUSE INVITATION

¶8. (U) Hashimi asked for additional details following Vice President Biden's recent invitation to visit the White House. PolM/C explained that dates were still being worked out and noted that the embassy will follow up as soon as possible.

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